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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies. Because the literature review of solutions named these categories: using various instructional strategies, moving away from simple memorization, and supporting students with freedom to take risks in spelling, these researchers focused on the solution of using various instructional strategies, specifically using the instructional strategies of breaking words up into parts, morning messages, personal dictionaries, word banks, word sorts, and word walls. The problem of applying spelling skills to daily written work was documented through the use of assessments that indicate spelling errors in spelling tests and written work, and a teacher survey of instructional strategies in spelling not aligned with best practices in spelling. After receiving feedback from the teachers from this survey, a spelling test was given to all the fifth grade classes. Two fifth grade classes were taught instructional teaching strategy interventions while a third classroom received no intervention. At the end of this period a spelling test and written prompt, both identical to those given the first week of school, were given to the students. Post intervention data indicated an increase in student spelling skills due to the use of effective teaching strategies. (Contains 25 references, 8 figures, and a table. Three appendixes contain the following: the parent consent form; a list of high frequency words; the teacher survey; a progress chart; lesson plans; a writing prompt; and a blank Spelling Dictionary.) (PM)

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IMPROVING STUDENT SPELLING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies. The targeted population consists of fifth grade students in a residential, middle class neighborhood. The problem of applying spelling skills to daily written work was documented through use of assessments that indicate spelling errors and documentation of misspelled words on spelling tests and written work, and a teacher survey of instructional strategies in spelling not aligned with best practices in spelling.

Because the literature review of solutions named these categories: using various instructional strategies, moving away from simple memorization, and supporting students with freedom to take risks in spelling, these researchers focused on the solution of using various instructional strategies, specifically using the instructional strategies of breaking words up into parts, morning messages, personal dictionaries, word banks, word sorts, and word walls.

At the beginning of the research a teacher survey of instructional strategies for spelling was distributed to teachers. This survey provided information on the way spelling was currently being taught in the classroom. After receiving feedback from the teachers on their instructional strategies for spelling, a spelling test was given to all the fifth grade classes. The test consisted of ninety words that are important for fifth graders to know. Two fifth grade classes were taught instructional teaching strategy interventions. The third fifth grade class continued to learn spelling without any intervention. During the sixteen weeks of research a class progress chart was kept to keep track of words that students are spelling correctly and incorrectly. At the end of the research period a spelling test was given to all of the fifth grade students. This spelling test was the same test that is given during the first week of research. In addition to a spelling test, a written prompt was also given to the students at the end of the research period. This written prompt was the same prompt given during the first week of school.

Post intervention data, which included a post spelling test using the high frequency words and a post written prompt, indicated an increase in student spelling skills due to the use of effective teaching strategies.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted fifth grade classes, which includes a cluster of students with learning disabilities, demonstrate difficulty applying spelling skills to daily written work due to ineffective teaching instruction. Evidence for this problem includes written documentation of misspelled words on spelling tests, written work, and a teacher survey of instructional strategies in spelling not aligned with best practices in spelling.

Immediate Problem Context

The School

The site is located in a residential, middle class neighborhood and has been serving the community since 1969. The one- story, rectangular, brick building encompasses a newly landscaped courtyard. The school obtained a new addition in 1999, which includes a gym, music room, five new classrooms, two new sixth grade bathrooms, and various offices. The property is a spacious piece of land, which contains an open soccer field, a baseball diamond, two basketball courts, and a newly installed playground.

The medium sized school serves 644 students in grade levels ranging from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. There are approximately 23.6 students per classroom. The

major racial /ethnic groups are 56.4% White, 7.1% Black, 3.2% Mexican- American, 4.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. The low-income population at the school is approximately 36% with a limited English proficiency of 27.2%. There are 135 students who are bused to and from school each day. In third grade through sixth grade, eight percent of the students have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

An average of 96.3% of the students attend school regularly. The mobility rate, based on the number of students who enroll in, and then leave school, is 39. 7%. The chronic truancy rate consists of 39 students, which is 5.7% of the school population (School Report Card 2000).

The school offers many after school activities such as the Supervised Activities for Employed Parents (S.A.F.E.) program, which is an extended care program for students of working parents. Other after school activities include basketball for both boys and girls, a peer tutoring program, band, orchestra and an art program called Young Rembrandts. Last year the school adopted a new inclusion plan for fifth and sixth grade. This plan allows special education students with a learning disability (LD) to remain in a regular education classroom rather than a self-contained LD classroom. The plan is staffed by five teacher assistants along with eight inclusion assistants. The bilingual program services kindergarten through fifth grade. In addition, there are many support services in the school, which include a social worker, nurse, psychologist, speech therapist, and a reading resource teacher.

The number of teachers at site A is 35. 85.7% of the teachers are female and 14.3% are male. Seventeen and one tenth percent of the teachers are Mexican-American and 82.9% are White. The support staff consists of 30 people. The average experience of the teachers is 15

years. 31.4% of the teachers have a degree beyond their Bachelor's. The average salary of the teachers is $35,000 a year. The expenditure per student is $6,953 a year.

The Classrooms

The classrooms that are the focus are located at the same site. Classroom A has 27 students. Three of the 27 students visit the social worker for 30 minutes a week. Two teachers work together in this classroom. One of the teachers is a full time regular education teacher while the other is a special education teacher who works in the classroom half of the day. Classroom B has 28 students. Two of the 28 students visit the social worker for 30 minutes a week. Classroom C has 27 students, and at this time no students see the social worker. The curriculums for all three classrooms consist of language arts, mathematics, reading, spelling, social studies, and science. In addition to these academics, the students attend physical education, art, and music classes once a week for 45 minutes. The students have music in the music room, and the art teacher comes to the classroom.

The Surrounding Community

The Local

The community has a population of 35,500 residents. The average median household income is $45,000 with a home value of $148,000. The community offers a safe environment. In order to enhance the safe environment, the police officers serve the community by teaching the drug abuse resistance education program (D.A.R.E.) in the local schools. The community library, located three miles from site A, organizes after school and summer events for children. Within the community there are many parks, forest preserves, and bike paths. The park district offers many sports programs such as football, soccer, baseball, and basketball, as well as summer camps

for children. There is one indoor and an outdoor pool, and the public high school offers swimming events at these locations.

The District

The district in which the site is located has been serving 11 cities and 3 counties for 128 years. The district covers a 90 square mile geographic area. The enrollment total is 37,705 students. The district has a diverse population which consists of 56.7% White, 29.2% Mexican-American, 7.5% Black, 6.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. There are 66 different languages represented in this growing school district. Over the past five years, the enrollment has increased by 5,000 students. There are 2,644 teachers, 510 education assistants, 329 secretaries, and 105 administrators in the district. The total number of personnel is 5,332. The administrative structure of the district includes one district superintendent and four area superintendents. The area superintendents work with a specific area within the district. The average salary for teachers with a type 1 certificate is $43,328. The average administrator salary is $73,799. The instructional expenditure per pupil is $4,344. The racial/ethnic background and gender of the district classroom teachers is 87.8% White, 2.4% Black, 9.0% Mexican-American, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.1% Native American, and 22.3% male and 77.7% female.

National Context of the Problem

Students have difficulty correctly spelling high frequency words as well as applying the correct spelling of words in their daily writing. Many schools use a traditional spelling program, which includes giving a pretest and a posttest. Teachers have been frustrated because they have found that "prepackaged spelling programs had little impact on young children's writing" (Rymer, 2000, p. 244). They have found that students have not mastered the high frequency words, and

that students do not apply the words from their spelling tests to their daily writing. Students tend to memorize the words for their tests, but then they forget the correct spelling when writing. In a study that was done with a first grade class, there was no "…research to suggest that students apply words from weekly spelling tests to their writing; in fact, the evidence suggested otherwise" (Gentry, 1987; Gill & Scharer, 1996; Laminack & Wood, 1996).

Spelling is a developmental process. Good spellers use a variety of strategies, whereas poor spellers use a minimal amount of strategies. A primary goal of spelling instruction is to have students "broaden the range of strategies the students use to spell unknown words" (Dudley-Marling, 1997, p. 242). Recently there has been an interest in how children learn to spell words. Many people assume that children are either naturally good spellers or poor spellers. However, it has been found that "…learning to spell involves a basic understanding of the principles of English orthography and an ability to apply that knowledge in the process of writing" (Rymer, 2000, p. 26). Students who have a greater ability to spell words correctly tend to be students who use various strategies to learn the spelling of words. This is a process that develops over time as students "actively investigate how words work" (Beers & Beers, 1997, p. 25).

Meeting the needs of learning disabled students has become more prevalent in today's society. A learning disabled student has an average or an above average IQ with a discrepancy between ability and achievement. To help meet students with these needs, each learning disabled student has an individualized education plan. Each individualized education plan has a set of goals that each child must meet.

Technology has become a major part of society and schools. One would think that students with learning disabilities would benefit or improve their spelling skills by using spell-check on a computer. Since most students with a learning disability do not spell words correctly on the first attempt while using spell check, they usually will either go to the next word, skip it, or not make a change at all. A reason for this is that "…the correctly spelled version of the word the students with learning disabilities are attempting to write is not presented as an alternative" (Ashton, 1999, p.26). Students are then left with a document containing many misspelled words. By doing this, students are not becoming better spellers.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the problem students have applying spelling skills to their daily written work, assessments that indicate spelling errors and written documentation of misspelled words on spelling tests were noted. In addition, evidence for the problem includes misspelled words in written work and a teacher survey of instructional strategies in spelling that are not aligned with best practices in spelling.

The teacher-researcher made and administered a spelling pretest consisting of high frequency words (Appendix A). The list of high frequency words is a list of words that are most commonly used in everyday writing. Students were tested on all 90 words. Each word was read aloud by the teacher one at a time and used in a sentence. Correct spelling of each word was considered a correct answer in this test.

The teacher-researcher administered the test to three fifth grade classes at site A during the first week of school. Eighty-three fifth graders took the spelling pretest of high frequency words. Mastery level is at 90% or better of correctly spelled words, partial mastery is at 70% to

89% of the correct responses, while non-mastery is for all scores below 70%. Figure 1 shows the percent of correctly spelled words for each classroom.

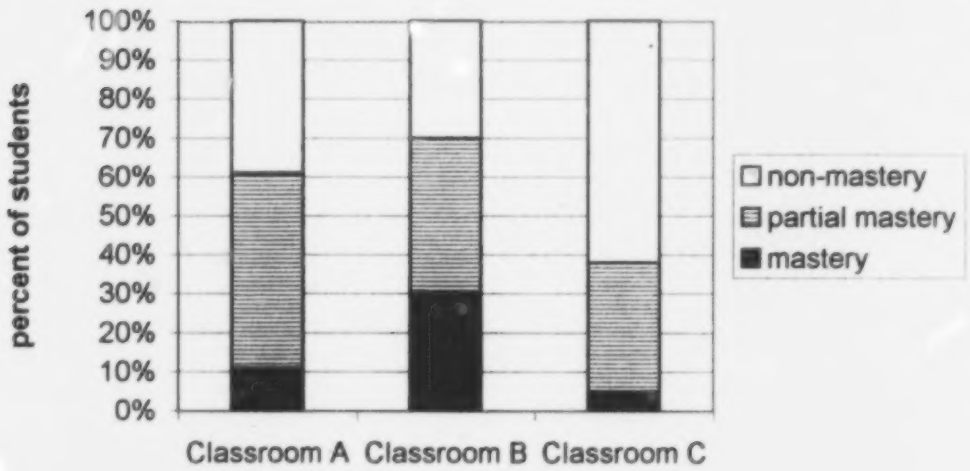

Figure 1. Percent of students achieving mastery of high frequency words.

At classroom A, 11% of the students scored at mastery level, 50% of the students scored at partial mastery, while 39% of the students scored at non-mastery of spelling high frequency words. At classroom B, 30% of the fifth graders achieved mastery level, 40% reached partial mastery, and 30% scored at the non-mastery level. At classroom C, 5% of the students tested at the mastery level, 33% tested at the partial mastery level, and 62% tested at the non-mastery level. The overall mean across all three classrooms is 72%, which represents the low borderline area of partial mastery. Overall, 16% of the fifth graders in the three classrooms scored at the mastery level on the high frequency words spelling pretest and 43% tested at the non-mastery level.

The teacher-researcher administered a written assignment to three fifth grade classes at site A. Each student wrote a paragraph using the same writing prompt (Appendix A). There were no right or wrong answers to the prompt. The writing assignment was administered during the first week of school, and each word spelled incorrectly was counted as a misspelled word. The average number of words written by the students was 97 words. Figure 2 shows the percentage of correctly spelled words and misspelled words for all three fifth grade classrooms combined.

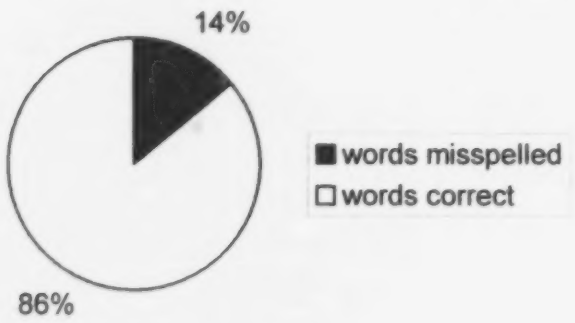

Figure 2. Percent of misspelled and correctly spelled words by fifth graders on a written assignment

At site A the percentage of words that were misspelled on the written assignment was 14%. The percentage of words spelled correctly was 86% of the words. The total number of words written by the students was 8,048 words, and the total number of misspelled words was 1,145 words. The calculated range of misspelled words on the writing assignment was 33 words.

The teacher-researcher made and administered a teacher survey (Appendix A) during the first week of school. The survey included five questions about spelling instruction. Writing sentences for spelling words is an assignment that is aligned with best practices for teaching spelling. ABC order, word searches, writing words, and writing definitions are assignments that are not aligned with best practices for teaching spelling. The survey was used to determine how teachers are teaching and assessing spelling in their classrooms. There are 28 teachers in the school, ranging from grades kindergarten to sixth, and 24 of those teachers completed the survey. One question on the survey asked what assignments teachers use for spelling each week. Twenty teachers listed more than one assignment that they use. Figure 3 shows the percentage of teachers that use various assignments for teaching spelling.

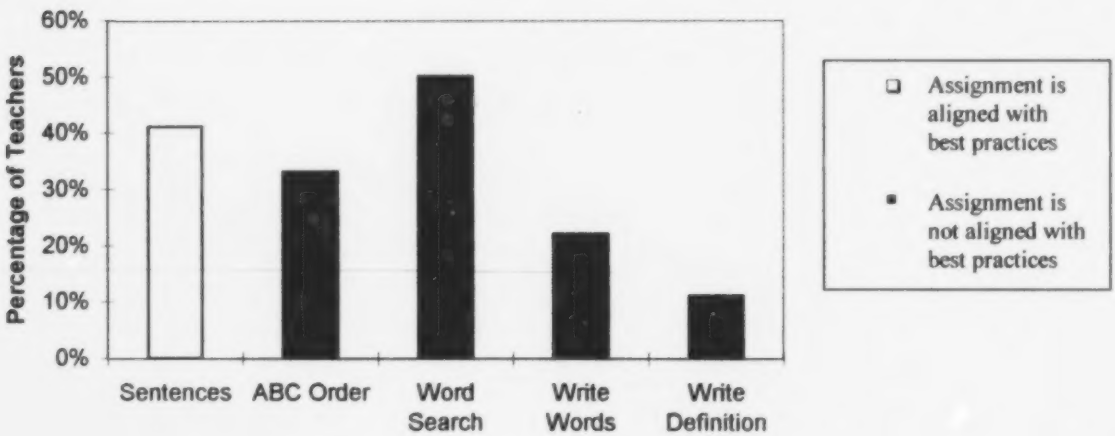

Figure 3. Percentage of teachers who use a particular spelling assignment.

At site A, 41% of the teachers use sentences as a spelling assignment in their classrooms. These sentences include using each spelling word in a sentence. Another assignment teachers use

for spelling is writing the spelling words in alphabetical order, and 33% of the teachers use this assignment for spelling. A common spelling assignment that teachers give their students is a word search that contains the spelling words, and 50% of the teachers at site A use this assignment. There are 22% of the teachers who have their students write the spelling words five times and 11% of the teachers have their students write the definition of each spelling word.

The teacher-researcher made and administered a teacher survey (Appendix A) during the first week of school. The survey contained five questions about spelling instruction. A question that was on this survey was how teachers select spelling words for spelling tests each week. Several teachers use more than one method of selecting words. All of the possibilities teachers suggested for selecting spelling words are aligned with best practices for teaching spelling when they are used together. Figure 3 shows the percentage of teachers that use each method of selecting words for the weekly spelling lists.

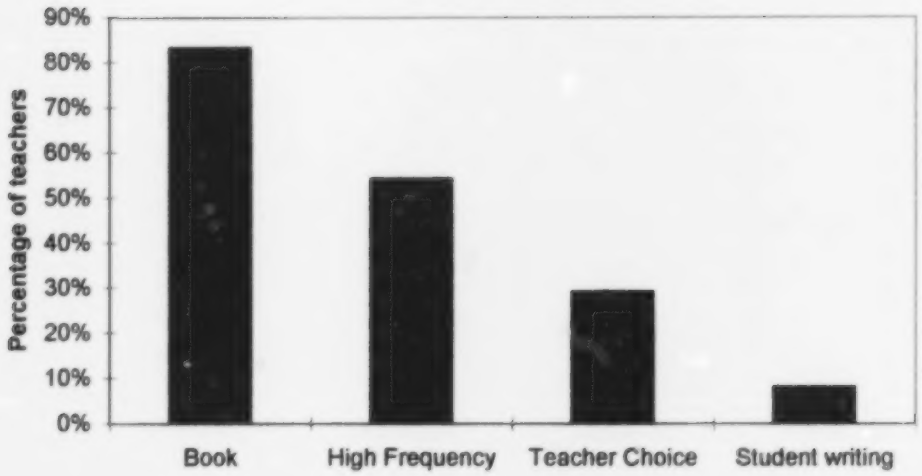

Figure 4. Percentage of teachers who use method of selecting spelling words.

At site A 83% of the teachers use the textbook the district provides to select the spelling words each week. There are 54% of the teachers who use high frequency words on the weekly spelling test while 29% of the teachers select words themselves. At site A 8% of the teachers use student writing to select spelling words for weekly spelling lists.

Probable Causes

The literature suggests several underlying causes for students' difficulty in applying spelling skills to daily written work. Among these causes are ineffective teaching instruction, lack or early intervention, ineffective assessments, frustration with spelling, and lack of parental support.

One of the main underlying causes for this problem is ineffective teaching instruction. In order to be effective in teaching spelling, teachers need proper training. Unfortunately teachers do not receive adequate ". . .training and instruction for teaching spelling in the classroom" (Lutz, 2000, p.7). Due to the lack of training, most elementary teachers ". . . treat spelling as a subject separate from the other language arts" (Lutz, 200, p.7). Many teachers think that memorization is the key of mastering spelling. Teachers continue to use the spelling textbook series, and have the tendency ". . .to neglect fundamental phases of English works as spelling and pronunciation by making them incidental to other studies" (Fresch, 1997, p.279). This is a continuing concern because students are not becoming better spellers. Teachers are emphasizing the memorization of spelling words without a ". . . relationship to the process of reading and writing" (Traynelis-Yurek, 1996, p. 279). Students are expected to memorize words, but they are not required to use the words on a daily basis. Students memorize words for a test, but they never have to use the words in their daily writing. Teachers are not making spelling a priority because they are not familiar with various strategies that can be used to teach spelling.

Another cause for the problems students have applying their spelling skills to their written work is due to the lack of early intervention. Often poor spelling skills are ". . . masked or ignored until requirements for written assignments increase, usually in the upper-elementary grades" (Berninger, 2000, p.117). Many children are not good spellers from a very early age on, however it is not noticed until later. By this time it is ". . . more difficult to overcome the spelling problems than it would have been had the student received early intervention to prevent this kind of transcription problem in the first place" (Berninger, 2000, p. 117). When students that have

difficulty spelling are not caught in the primary grades, they have more problems later applying their spelling skills to their written work.

Ineffective assessments are another cause for students not applying spelling skills to their daily written work. Often rote learning is used instead of making words meaningful to the student. Spelling is very teacher directed, and does not allow for students to learn words that they use in their daily writing. Students should be assessed on words that are meaningful to them, rather than words that are selected from a spelling textbook. When selecting words for students, lists must be formed by " knowledge of student's developmental level rather than dictated by the theme of the month" (Gill, 1996, p. 94). Teachers tend to give their entire class a spelling list that may not meet the needs of all students. Those students who have difficulty with spelling strategies may find the spelling list frustrating and lose motivation and self-confidence. Those students who excel in spelling and need more of a challenge may be bored with the spelling list and not advance in spelling. Simply using teacher directed assessments and rote memorization causes difficulty for students to apply spelling skills to their daily work.

Students have difficulty applying spelling skills to their daily written work when they become frustrated with spelling. Many students stated, "their poor spelling is a primary reason why they hated to or refused to write" (Chandler, 2000, p.87). Spelling should be more than just rote memorization. Students often get confused by all of the spelling rules, and words are not made meaningful to them. When students are asked to spell words correctly for a weekly test they simply learn the word for the test. Later in their writing the word is misspelled, which causes

students to become frustrated. Therefore, teachers should help "create competent and independent spellers and writers" (Scott, 1994, p. 188).

Also the lack of parental support and involvement leads teachers to frustration when teaching spelling. Parents do not reinforce spelling skills at home. They understand that spelling is a crucial skill, however parents do not "see the relationships or the sequence of development the same way teachers do" (Chandler, 2000, p. 6). When parents do not understand the development of spelling skills, they have the tendency to just let teachers teach spelling without reinforcing skills at home. All of these factors lead to teacher frustration, which in turn leads to ineffective teaching instruction.

There are many causes for the problems students have applying their spelling skills to their daily written work. One of those problems includes ineffective teaching instruction, due to the inadequate training teachers receive on how to effectively teach spelling. Other causes for the problem include lack of early intervention, ineffective assessments, and student frustration. Teaching instruction is ineffective because teachers do not have adequate training to learn how to teach spelling effectively. Evidence for this problem in Site A includes written documentation of misspelled words in students' written work, misspelled words on tests, and a teacher survey of the strategies they use to teach spelling.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Literature suggests several solutions to improve students' spelling skills in their daily writing. Among these solutions are using a variety of strategies, children managed learning, self-selected words, worthwhile spelling instruction, spelling dictionaries, breaking words up, and word sorts.

The solution suggested in the literature is that a variety of strategies should be used to teach spelling. There are so many different rules in spelling so a ". . .learner must draw on several strategies. . . [because] no single strategy can be used to overcome all irregularities in written English" (Topping, 1995, p. 374). When using more than one strategy to teach spelling, students are more likely to learn the spelling of words. They are given the opportunity to learn spelling in a variety of ways. Using only one strategy causes boredom. Students are more likely to learn how to spell when given different approaches and ways of learning.

One solution suggested in the literature is ". . .to help children manage their own learning" (Topping, 1995, p. 374). This is a strategy to use that will enable students to become better

spellers. Teachers can help students manage their own learning by using an ". . . interactive way, which involves children in evaluating the success of their own strategies" (Topping, 1995, p. 374). When students are given the opportunity to evaluate their own spelling skills, they are more likely to become more active in learning how to spell.

Research shows that ". . .children with spelling problems made better progress when they were actively involved in a self-selected learning strategy than when similar routines were imposed by teachers" (Topping, 1995, p. 375). Allowing students to select words that they want to learn how to spell gives the students a more active role in the process of learning how to spell. Also selecting words from students' writing demonstrates to students that the words they need to learn are words they use in their writing. Students need to understand how words they are learning to spell are important to them.

Worthwhile spelling instruction should be based on more than ". . .merely drill and practice of unrelated words or on testing and retesting for achievement of mastery" (Griffith, 1995, p. 90). Testing and retesting does not help students learn to spell, and it does not improve their abilities to apply spelling skills to their daily written work. Teachers should evaluate students' spellings "qualitatively and design spelling activities that are congruent with children's existing word knowledge" (Griffith, 1995, p. 90). This will enable students "to expand their knowledge about the spellings of individual words"(Griffith, 1995, p.90).

Another strategy suggested in the literature is to use personal spelling dictionaries. Personal dictionaries are an effective approach to teaching spelling because teachers can ". . . hold

kids accountable for what they learn as well as to personalize the spelling curriculum for learners with different needs" (Chandler, 2000, p. 91). By using a spelling dictionary, students are able to refer to it for future reference for their writing. Words students have learned to spell or words they find interesting can be included in the spelling dictionary. Including words like these in their dictionaries ". . . can be helpful in noting spelling growth" (Scott, 1994, p. 190).

Breaking words up is another effective strategy that can be used when teaching spelling. Students look for words within words. For example, if the word were "teacher" the students could look at the word and see that in the word "teacher" there are also the words "tea", "each", and "her". Sometimes it is easier for a student to spell a longer word when they know how to spell the smaller words within the word. This strategy is effective because ". . . looking at word parts as they fit into whole words can help children learn spelling patterns" (Scott, 1994, p.190).

Still another strategy that can be used when teaching spelling is the use of word sorts. A word sort is "a manipulative activity in which individual words are printed on small cards and are then grouped or categorized according to a specific feature" (Gill, 1996, p.91). The words can be grouped together based things such as the 'long a' sound or the 'ly' endings. The teacher can make it a closed sort by telling the students how to categorize the words, or it can be an open sort by leaving it up to the students. Allowing students to find the patterns and categorize words, enables them to "move beyond simple memorization and develop ways to become active in making sense of and drawing relationships about the English language" (Fresch, 1997, p. 21).

Teachers can use all of these strategies to help students improve their spelling skills in their daily writing. Providing students with the opportunity to learn how to spell using different strategies will encourage them to become better spellers.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the use of effective teaching strategies, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the targeted fifth grade classes will increase their application of spelling skills in daily written work, as measured by teacher-constructed spelling tests and review of progress charts.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. A series of learning activities that address improving spelling skills will be developed. These activities will include breaking up words and word sorts.
2. Morning messages will be constructed by the teacher for students to view words from their spelling list given on a daily basis.
3. The following items will be purchased:
    - Paper for personal dictionaries for the students to construct the spelling words in alphabetical order
    - Word bank journals for students to record words
    - Materials to create a word wall bulletin board

Project Action Plan

Table 1. Project action plan

Project Objective	Intervention	Targeted Group Behavior	Teacher/ Researcher Behavior	Materials	Time: Frequency & Duration
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Develop and purchase materials that foster improvement of spelling skills	None	Researchers review and collect materials for spelling activities	Word bank journals, collected materials for personal dictionaries, labels and word wall	August 2001 during day three of researchers' planning meeting
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer teacher survey of instructional strategies for spelling	Teachers K-6 take the survey	Researchers collect and review surveys	Teacher survey	August 2001 during week one of research
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer spelling pretest	Fifth grade students take pretest	Researchers and fifth grade teachers administer and correct pretest	Spelling pretest	Week one of research project (30 minutes) of one instructional period
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Monitor students' spelling progress	None	Researchers record and review individualized and whole group progress charts	Class progress chart and individual progress chart	August 2001 during the 15 weeks of research

Project Objective	Intervention	Targeted Group Behavior	Teacher/ Researcher Behavior	Materials	Time: Frequency & Duration
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer various spelling strategies	None	Researcher #1 will develop five spelling strategies	Word bank journals, collected materials for personal dictionaries	August 2001 during week 1 through week 16 of December 2001
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer various spelling strategies	None	Researcher #1 will introduce the breaking up of words and word sorts	Teacher made spelling list	August 2001 during week one through week 16 of December 2001
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer various spelling strategies	None	Researcher #2 will develop five spelling strategies	Word bank journals, collected materials for personal dictionaries, sticky notes (labels), word wall	August 2001 during week one through week 16 of December 2001
To improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies.	Administer spelling post test	Fifth grade students take post test	Researchers and fifth grade teachers administer and correct the post test	Spelling post test	December 2001 during week 16 of project research

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, tests covering the skills identified for spelling will be developed. These tests include a high frequency word pretest and post test as well

as a written test using a writing prompt. In addition, class progress charts (Appendix B) will be recorded as part of the assessment process. Teacher surveys of instructional strategies for spelling will be administered then gathered and recorded.

There are many solutions to help improve the students' spelling skills in their daily writing. Some of these solutions suggested in literature are using a variety of strategies, allowing children to manage their own learning, actively involving students in selecting spelling words they want to learn how to spell, using personal spelling dictionaries, breaking words up, and using word sorts. These solutions are suggestions that can improve students' spelling skills. The solutions that will be used in the targeted fifth grade class are personal spelling dictionaries, breaking words up, and word sorts. By using these solutions students will increase their application of spelling skills in their daily written work, as measured by spelling tests and review of progress charts. The students will be assessed through the use of spelling tests, class progress charts, individual progress charts, and teacher surveys.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve student spelling skills in their daily written work through the use of effective teaching strategies. The implementation used for this project was various spelling strategies.

Early in August the teacher-researchers met for three days to plan the strategies for the project. During the three day planning period, materials such as word bank journals, personal dictionaries, and word wall bulletin board supplies were purchased and collected.

A teacher survey was also designed, distributed, and collected during the first week of research. Both experimental groups, as well as the control group, took the high frequency word pretest. The pretest consisted of 90 high frequency words. The teacher-researchers collected and graded each pretest and recorded the scores.

Each week students were given six high frequency words on their spelling test. The teacher-researchers recorded student scores on the class progress chart.

The teacher-researchers 1 and 2 implemented the first spelling strategy, morning message, during the second week of research. The purpose of the morning message was to expose students to their spelling words for the week. The students read a paragraph and corrected the misspelled words. Three weeks into the research, the researchers implemented a new spelling strategy, personal spelling dictionaries (Appendix C). The students used these dictionaries to record any words they did not know how to spell either on their spelling test or their written work. During the sixth week of research, the researchers implemented the word bank journals. Each week the students recorded their six high frequency words in their word bank journals. The words in the journals were categorized alphabetically, and were then used for student reference.

Into the ninth week of research, teacher-researcher 1 implemented the word sorts strategy. The students use this strategy to put the spelling words into various categories. During the last three weeks of research, teacher-researcher 1 implemented the spelling strategy, breaking words up. The students use this strategy to find other words within the spelling word. During the ninth week of research, teacher-researcher 2 implemented the word wall bulletin board. The bulletin board consisted of word families, which emphasized suffixes.

The last three weeks of research, teacher-researcher 2 implemented the spelling strategy, writing sentences. This strategy was used for students to write each of their spelling words in a sentence that made sense.

During the final week of research, the teacher-researchers administered a final spelling post-test covering all ninety high frequency words. The researchers graded and recorded the

results of the spelling post-test. Also during the final week of research the teacher-researchers administered the teacher survey to all of the teachers. This was the same survey that was used in the first week of research. There were no changes in the responses on the teacher survey. It is evident that teachers are still doing typical things in spelling with their students. These things are not aligned with best practices for teaching spelling.

Lesson plans devoted to each of these spelling strategies can be found in Appendix C. Each strategy was used for thirty minutes three times a week.

The teacher-researchers found that the students were used to poor strategies for spelling from their previous school years. Many students expected to do the usual spelling assignments that are not aligned with the best practices for teaching spelling. The students enjoyed the new spelling strategies that they were exposed to throughout the research. The strategies used were unfamiliar to many of the students.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effect of the various strategies for teaching spelling on student written work, a written prompt was given to each student in the three fifth grade classrooms (appendix C). The same writing prompt was given to the students during the first week of school as well as the last week of research. The average number of words written by the students was 98 words. Figure 5 shows the percentage of correctly spelled words and misspelled words on final written prompt for all three fifth grade classrooms.

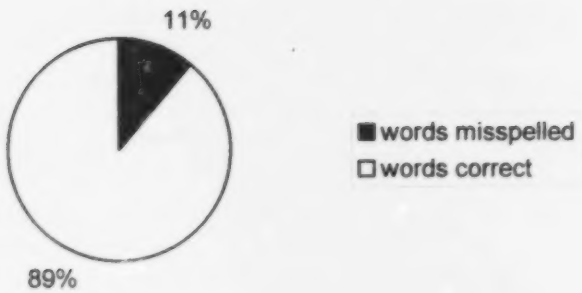

Figure 5. Percent of misspelled and correctly spelled words by fifth graders on the post written assignment.

The written assignment shows that the spelling strategies had a positive effect on students' spelling skills. The percentage of words that were misspelled on the final writing prompt was 11%. The percentage of words spelled correctly was 89% of the words. The total number of words written by the students was 8,036 words, and the total number of misspelled words was 884 words. The calculated range of misspelled words on the writing assignment was 35.

One of the strategies used throughout the research was breaking up words. The students in Classroom B were given ten words. Their assignment was to find all the words within the spelling word. Each student was given the same list of ten words. The students' answers and the percentage of words correctly found were recorded and calculated. The total number of possible words that could be found on the list was 33 words. Figure 6 shows the percentage of correctly found words using the strategy breaking up words.

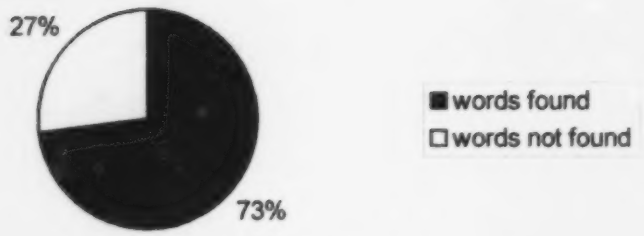

Figure 6. Percent of words found and words not found using the breaking up words strategy.

The results show that in Classroom B, the students were able to find an average of 73% of the words in their list of ten words. The calculated range of words found correctly was 28.

Another strategy that was used throughout research was word sorts. The students in classroom B were given a list of words to categorize. The assignment was to put the list of words into categories. Each student had the same list of words. The scores were calculated based on three different categories, which were no categories found, mistaken categories, or all categories were correct. Figure 7 shows the percentage of students in each category.

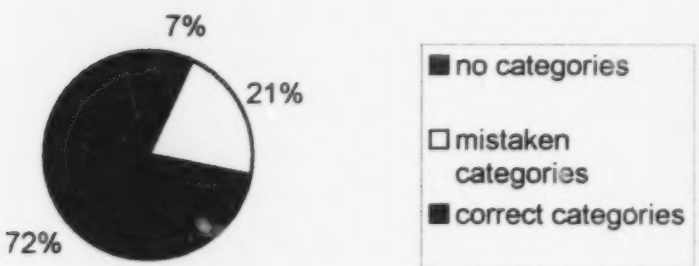

Figure 7. Percent of students in each category for the word sorts strategy.

The results show that 72% of the students in classroom B were able to correctly categorize the list of words. These students were able to find the categories on their own, and they were able to put the words into the correct category. In classroom B, 21% of the students were able to create categories for the words, but they had some of the words put into a wrong category. Finally, 7% of the students were not able to find any categories for the words.

In order to assess the effects of the teaching strategies used for spelling, a post-test was administered to all three fifth grade classrooms. The post-test consisted of the same 90 high frequency words that were used for the pretest. Mastery level is at 90% of better of correctly spelled words, partial mastery is at 70% to 89% of the correct responses, while non-mastery is for all scores below 70%. Figure 8 shows the percent of correctly spelled words on the post-test for each classroom.

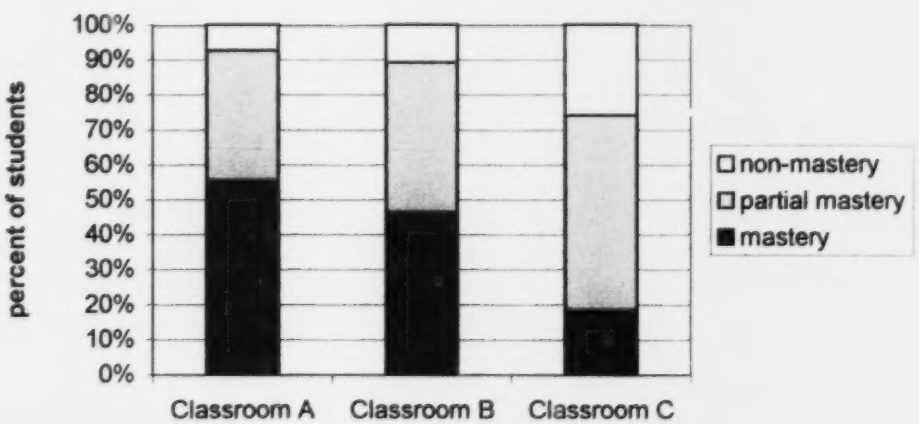

Figure 8. Percent of students achieving mastery of high frequency words.

At classroom A, which used the intervention of the various teaching strategies, 56% of the students scored at mastery level, 37% scored at partial mastery, while 7% of the students scored

at non-mastery of spelling high frequency words. At classroom B, which used the intervention of various teaching strategies, 46% of the fifth graders achieved mastery level, 43% scored at partial mastery, and 11% scored at the non-mastery level. At classroom C, the control group, 20% of the students tested at the mastery level, 60% reached the partial mastery level, and 20% tested at the non-mastery level. The overall mean across all three classrooms is 84%, which represents the high end of the partial mastery of spelling words. Overall, 40% of the fifth graders in the three classrooms scored at the mastery level on the high frequency words post-test and 12% scored at the non-mastery level. The effect size for classroom A is 0.5, and the effect size for classroom B is 0.51. The effect sizes show that there was a positive increase in student achievement at the end of the research period.

The teacher survey that was administered by the teacher-researchers during the first week of research was administered again during the last week of research. The results of the post survey indicate that there was no change in the approach teachers use to teach spelling. The strategies used by the teachers are the same strategies used at the beginning of research. These strategies do not align with best practices for teaching spelling.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on teaching strategies for spelling, the students in the experimental groups showed a significant improvement in their mastery of spelling words. The strategies that were used were aligned with best practices for teaching spelling. The amount of teacher preparation time and energy that was devoted to teaching the strategies increased, but was worthwhile because the strategies were effective. The responsibility of the students increased as they were instructed to record unfamiliar or misspelled words in their

personal spelling dictionaries on their own. The mastery of high frequency words greatly increased as the students used various strategies for learning the words.

The intervention used to effectively teach spelling words to students is highly recommended. By using a combination of the various strategies, students were able to master more of the high frequency words. The teacher-researchers recommend using a combination of the various strategies for the most effective results.

In order for the intervention to be most beneficial for the students, it is recommended that the 90 high frequency words be divided into six words per week. Each week for spelling, a regular spelling list, which consists of a set of words with a pattern, should be used along with the six high frequency words for the week. Introduce a new strategy every two weeks to the class. Continue to use all of the strategies once they are introduced. If students have not shown mastery of a certain strategy, the teacher-researchers recommend modifying the amount of time spent on that strategy. Some strategies are more complicated to learn than others, so students may need more than two weeks to master a particular strategy.

It is important to review previous spelling words. Even though the high frequency words are divided into six words per week, the students should still be reviewing the previous week's words.

One of the drawbacks in using this intervention is when students are absent and a new strategy is introduced. Either a teacher or a peer can teach the new strategy, however, the absent student often needs more than an explanation. Another drawback to this intervention is that it requires several materials to be purchased. Materials that need to be purchased include paper for

spelling dictionaries, word bank journals, and materials for the word wall bulletin board. If the school does not pay for the materials, the materials become the teacher's own expense.

In conclusion, the teacher-researchers found that all the strategies used for the intervention were effective. They were most effective when they were used consistently and when they were used together. The intervention used was very successful, and many of the students improved their spelling skills. They became more motivated and apt to learn their spelling words. The intervention can be successfully incorporated into any classroom. However, there would have to be teacher training. Many teachers are not familiar with the spelling strategies used throughout research. Once teachers are familiar with the new spelling strategies, they can be integrated into the classroom, and a high rate of success will be evident.

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Appendix A
Parent Consent Form
List of High Frequency Words
Teacher Survey

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving Student Spelling Skills Through the Use of Effective Teaching Strategies

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires us to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects our instruction. We have chosen to examine spelling skills of students in their daily written work.

The purpose of this project is to improve students' spelling skills through the use of effective teaching strategies. It will help your student improve their spelling skills in their daily written work through the use of our teaching strategies.

We will be conducting our project from August 28 through December 12. The activities related to the project will take place during regular instructional delivery. The gathering of information for our project during these activities offers no risks of any kind to your child.

Your permission allows us to include your student in the reporting of information for our project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what we have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about our project, please contact us at Ridge Circle School (630) 213-5600.

If you agree to have your student participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to us. We will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

PLEASE RETURN THE ATTACHED STATEMENT TO US BY SEPTEMBER 5.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving Student Spelling Skills Through the Use of Effective Teaching Strategies

I, _____ , the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researchers have explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

NAME OF MINOR: _____

_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

IMPORTANT WORDS TO KNOW IN 5TH GRADE

about	again	almost	also	always
another	anyone	are	beautiful	because
before	buy	by	can't	could
didn't	doesn't	don't	enough	especially
everybody	everyone	everything	except	excited
favorite	first	friends	getting	have
hole	I'm	into	it's	its
knew	know	laugh	let's	myself
new	no	off	one	our
people	probably	really	right	said
school	something	sometimes	terrible	that's
their	then	there	they're	thought
threw	through	to	too	two
until	usually	very	want	was
wear	weather	we're	went	were
what	when	where	whether	who
whole	with	won	won't	wouldn't
write	your	you're	trouble	they

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions based on the spelling instruction you use in your classroom.

1.) How often do you teach spelling?

2.) How do you select the spelling words the students will learn?

3.) List the assignments you give for spelling.

4.) How often do you assess spelling?

5.) Do you have any additional comments about how you teach spelling?

Appendix B
Progress Chart

WEEKLY IMPORTANT WORDS
FOR WHOLE CLASS
(CLASS PROGRESS CHART)

Week 1	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
about			
beautiful			
can't			
enough			
terrible			
that's			

Week 2	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
again			
because			
excited			
first			
I'm			
where			

Week 3	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
almost			
by			
everybody			
their			
to			
you're			

Week 4	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
anyone			
doesn't			
knew			
they're			
two			
when			

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Week 5	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
also			
don't			
everyone			
something			
until			
who			

Week 6	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
our			
everything			
friends			
there			
too			
trouble			

Week 7	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
always			
didn't			
it's			
through			
went			
won			

Week 8	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
could			
getting			
know			
really			
one			
with			

Week 9	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
favorite			
right			
sometimes			
was			
whole			
they			

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Week 10	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
another			
let's			
Its			
Were			
wouldn't			
usually			

Week 11	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
Before			
Into			
probably			
won't			
Said			
Are			

Week 12	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
Buy			
except			
New			
weather			
we're			
thought			

Week 13	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
especially			
Very			
Your			
Write			
Have			
Off			

Week 14	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
People			
whether			
Then			
What			
School			
Hole			

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Week 15	# correct	# incorrect	% correct
laugh			
myself			
know			
through			
wear			
want			

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix C
Lesson Plans
Writing Prompt
Spelling Dictionary

Morning Message

Lesson/Strategy: Morning Message

Time Frame: One day a week for thirteen weeks
30 minutes

Objective: The students will correctly spell this misspelled words in the morning message. The misspelled words will have been taken from the students spelling list for that particular week.

Procedures:

1. The teacher will write a morning message on the chalkboard. The morning message will contain words from the students' spelling list from that week.
2. The students will rewrite the morning message by correcting each of the misspelled words and any additional grammar mistakes.
3. When all of the students are finished, the class will discuss the corrections aloud. The teacher will then collect the students' work to keep on file.

Spelling Partners

Lesson/Strategy: Spelling Partners

Time Frame: One day a week for thirteen weeks
30 minutes

Objective: The purpose of this lesson was for the students to review their weekly spelling words by correctly spelling out the words orally. The students receive points for each word spelled correctly.

Procedures:

1. The students gather their materials. They will use their spelling list, paper, pencil, and two number cubes.
2. The teacher will randomly select two students to pair up and find a place around the room.
3. Student 1 will roll the two number cubes. He or she will multiply the two digits together to receive a point value. Student 2 gives student 1 a spelling word within a sentence. If student 1 spells it correctly, he or she earns the number of points they rolled. If that student spells it incorrectly, he or she receives zero points. Then the two players reverse roles. They keep playing until all spelling words have been given.
4. After the spelling list has been completed, the students will add up their scores. The student with the highest score wins!

Word Bank Journals

Lesson/Strategy: Word Bank Journals

Time Frame: One day a week
15 minutes

Objective: The word bank journals were to be used as a reference for the students.

Procedures:

1. The teacher gives the students the spelling pre-test. Each spelling list contains six high frequency words.
2. After the spelling pretest was given by the teacher, the students then correct their own papers.

After the students are finished correcting their spelling pretest, they are to take their high frequency spelling words from that pretest and write them in their word bank journal. The students will then use their word bank journal as a reference. The word bank journals are arranged in alphabetical order, which makes it easier for studying.

Word Wall Bulletin Board

Lesson/Strategy: Word Wall

Time Frame: One day a week for ten weeks
30 minutes

Objective: The students will be exposed to various words that contain a common suffix. **The students should be able to make the connection between the suffix and the root word.**

Procedures:

1. The students will be given a suffix ending such as (ail). The students then need to come up with as many words that they can think of with the given suffix. They may work in pairs, groups, or alone.
2. The students will then discuss as a class the words that they brainstormed with the correct suffix ending.
3. The students should be able to see the relationship between various word endings of how they are spelled and pronounced.
4. The teacher will have ready-made cards with the suffix ending that they learned that day and several examples following. After each lesson, the teacher will display the word wall cards on the bulletin board for the students to use as a reference.

Breaking Words Up

Lesson/Strategy: Breaking Up Words

Time frame: 3 days a week
15 minutes

Objective: The students should be able to take one spelling word at a time and find other words within the spelling word.

Procedures:

1. The students are given a worksheet of seven spelling words.
2. The students are to take one spelling word at a time and find as many other words within the word as they can.
3. When most of the class has finished, the students will get into groups and discuss their answers.

Word Sorts

Lesson/Strategy: Word Sorts

Time Frame: One day a week
20 minutes

Objective: The purpose of this lesson is to take the spelling words from the weekly list and categorize them.

Procedures:

1. The teacher pairs the students randomly.
2. Each group receives all of the words on the weekly spelling list. The words are typed, individually cut, and put in a plastic zip-lock bag.
3. The students take the words out and make as many categories as they can. The words may be grouped alphabetically, according to prefix and suffix, nouns and verbs, etc.
4. The teacher walks around the room and facilitates.
5. When most students are finished, the teacher calls attention and discusses the class' results.

Writing Prompt

Write a paragraph answering the question below.

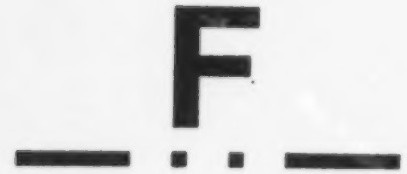
If you could trade places with anyone, who would it be and why?

Spelling Dictionary A

B

C

E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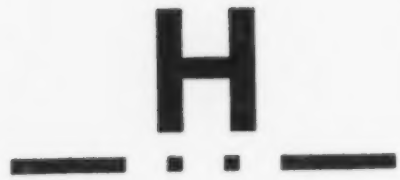

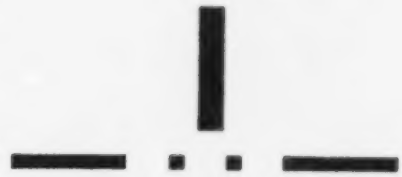

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